

# Penelope Umbrico

Born 1957, Philadelphia, PA  
Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

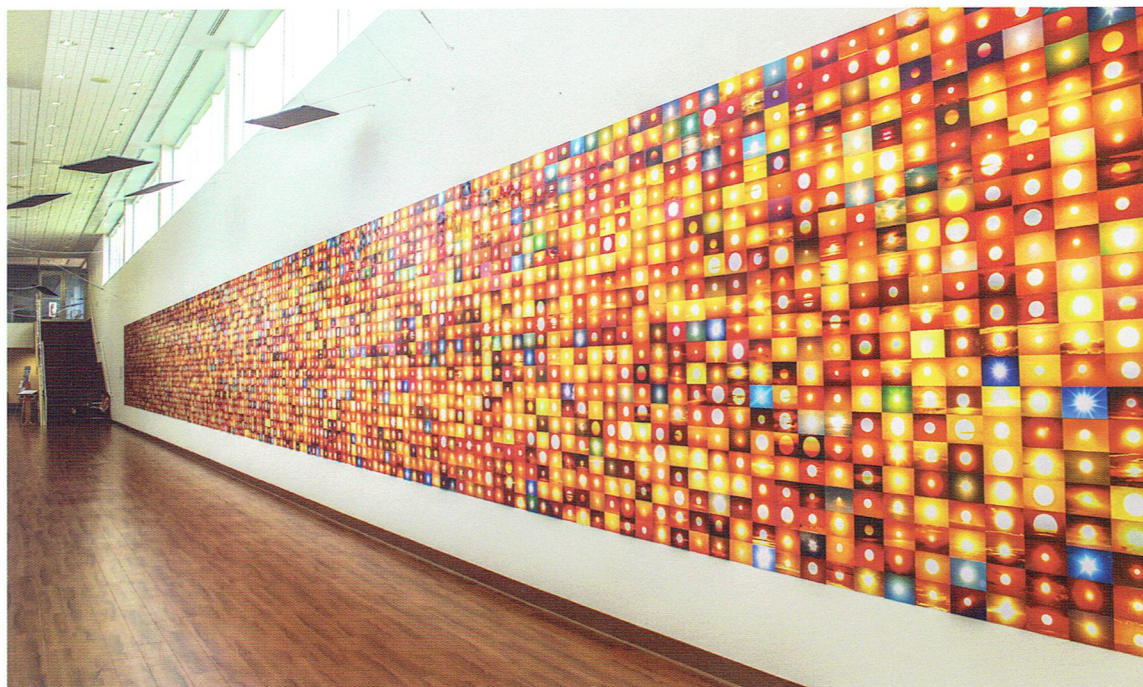
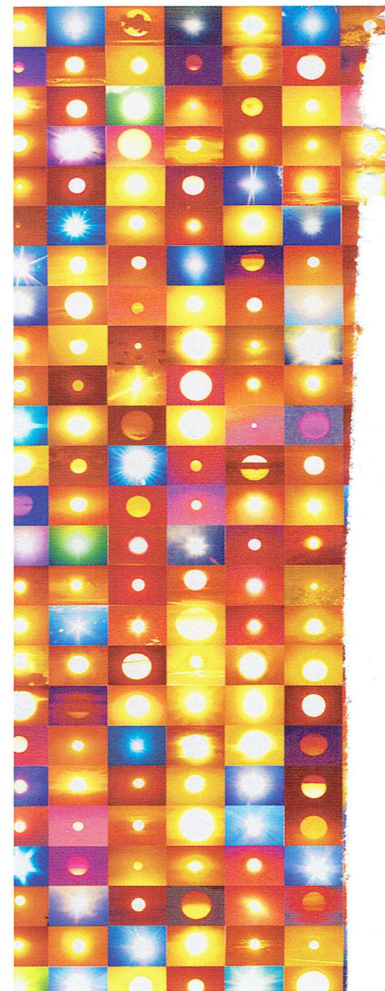
Interested in the way images function in technology, social media, and commercial Internet outlets, Penelope Umbrico takes a fact or nuance from these channels and exacerbates its most profound qualities in her work. She found, for example, that the sunset was the most photographed subject posted on the social media site Flickr. More interested in the number of images uploaded than in the sunset as a subject itself, Umbrico expanded upon the unfailingly similar nature of the images by formulaically cropping each one and positioning the sun in the middle.

"I take the sheer quantity of images online as a collective archive that represents us—a constantly changing auto-portrait... an accumulation that navigates between consumer and producer, materiality and immateriality, and individual and collective expression." Printing thousands of these images for her installations (4,224 in our Schmidt Center Gallery Public Space), the overwhelming understanding of the multitude of people participating in this social sharing event becomes visually palpable and physically experienced.

Penelope Umbrico attended OCAD University, Toronto, and earned an MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York. Umbrico's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions nationally and internationally at Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA; Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; as well as Milwaukee Art Museum, WI (2016). Her work is in the permanent collections of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; among others. She is the recipient of numerous awards including a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. Umbrico has published two monographs, *Penelope Umbrico (photographs)* (Aperture, 2011) and *Out of Order* (RVB Books, 2014) as well as an artist book, *Range* (Aperture, 2014). Umbrico is core faculty in the MFA Photography, Video, and Related Media program at the School of Visual Arts, New York.

Penelope Umbrico, *22,653,725 Suns from Sunsets from Flickr (Partial)* 9/17/2014, 2014, 4224  
4 x 6" machine C-prints, 87 x 1152"; installation view (below); detail view (right)

Courtesy of the artist and Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City



shadow and light. Included in the foreground is a screen with a barely perceptible tear on the lower left-hand side. This "piercing" moment seems to be a kind of analogy for cutting through pixels, touching the stuff of photography, handling its precarious material body.

As a counterpoint to such abstractions, the visual weight of John Mann's *Untitled (From Drift Series)* (2013) anchors *Altarations* in the acknowledgement of accumulated time and process once more. The artist has described this series as "[I]mages made after the understanding that often the most profound movement is weighted and slow."<sup>11</sup> These magnified rocks embody Mann's interest in patience and time. Propped against the gallery wall, they return thoughts to the concrete weight of photography and bring home the fact that there are indeed physical realities of photography "that cannot be reduced to pixilated data."<sup>12</sup>

By thinking through the photograph as both a material thing and a philosophical question,<sup>13</sup> the post-conceptual practices included in *Altarations* acknowledge how photography matters in the present. In varying degrees the artworks included reveal the irony that as

perilously immaterial photography may at times seem, "concrete photography" and "abstract photography" remain two sides of the same coin. Rather than taking the photograph for granted as an evidentiary fact, these artists interrogate its construction of meaning. Historicity and immediacy both play a role in this equation, as the entwining of archaic processes and contemporary technologies in the digital age demonstrate a motivated relationship between form and meaning that is continuously in the midst of being altered.

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2, "Angelus Novus": Perspectives on Walter Benjamin (Winter 1999): 289-305.

<sup>2</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> In Keith F. Davis, *An American Century of Photography: From Dry Plate to Digital*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 310; also in Lyle Rexer, *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography* (New York: Aperture, 2009), 132.

<sup>4</sup> Rexer, 179, in reference to the work of Marco Breuer.

<sup>5</sup> Rexer, 147.

<sup>6</sup> In Peirce's own words: "a real thing or fact which is a sign of its object by virtue of being connected with it as a matter of fact and by also forcibly intruding upon

the mind, quite regardless of its being interpreted as a sign," Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* 4.447 quoted in Walter Benn Michaels, "The Death of a Beautiful Woman," *Interval(le)s* II. 2- III. 1 (Fall 2008/Winter 2009): 573.

<sup>7</sup> Rosalind Deutsche, "Darkness: The Emergence of James Welling," *James Welling: Abstract*, exhibition catalog (Brussels and Toronto: Palais des Beaux-Arts and Art Gallery of York University, 2002), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Rosalind Deutsche, 13. Deutsche is referring to Welling's comments in James Welling, "Abstract," *Effects: Magazine for New Art Theory*, no. 2 (1984): 18.

<sup>9</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Photography and Abstraction," *A Debate on Abstraction*, exhibition catalog (New York: Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, 1989), 66.

<sup>10</sup> "Jibade-Khalil Huffman: *The Four People You Meet at Every Drug Deal*," exhibition description, Samuel Freeman Gallery website, [www.samueelfreeman.com/exhibitions/jibade-khalil-huffman/](http://www.samueelfreeman.com/exhibitions/jibade-khalil-huffman/).

<sup>11</sup> John Mann website, [www.rockpapercloud.com/project/project-statements/](http://www.rockpapercloud.com/project/project-statements/).

<sup>12</sup> Rexer, 184.

<sup>13</sup> See Geoffrey Batchen in Carol Squiers, Geoffrey Batchen, George Baker, and Hito Steyerl, *What is a Photograph?* (Munich: DelMonico Books), 61.

